

Executive Summary



Community Reinvestment Strategy



Cluster 9 Executive Summary

The unique qualities of Cluster 9 are most evident by the predominance of quality neighborhoods heavily influenced by major thoroughfares and transportation routes. Major freeways delineate the cluster area on three sides (Lodge on the east, Jeffries on the south, and Southfield on the west), and a major state trunk line (Eight Mile Road) is located on the remaining border. Another state road, Grand River, bisects a large part of the cluster diagonally. That these defining edges are man-made and facilitate movement by the automobile distinctly influences the bedroom communities within their boundaries. Most all industrial at the perimeters, leaving the interior of the district for residential and neighborhood serving commercial uses.

Cluster 9 neighborhoods vary greatly in terms of quality, but, aside from a few pockets of deterioration, remain predominantly middle-class in nature. These neighborhoods were built to house thousands of families with sufficient earnings to own an automobile, a single family home and yard - a suburban model within city lines. Most of the neighborhoods were built out during the city's boom years prior to the Depression of 1929. Unfortunately, the predominance of older housing stock is at risk if not properly maintained.

The most pressing issues facing Cluster 9 residents and businesses relate to the need for maintenance and stabilization of the community, which will require a tremendous economic and community investment to rebuild. Stakeholders firmly believe that neighborhoods with the highest percentage of homeowners also have the highest level of stability.

Following are the topics under which the issues and recommended strategies for reinvestment were developed. Only the top three strategies, as decided by the stakeholders are included in this Executive Summary. The full listing of strategies is fully listed under Section V, Reinvestment Recommendations, of this report.

Neighborhood Commercial Uses

Commercial districts in Cluster 9 were primarily built prior to the 1950s and line virtually every major road. The buildings serviced a different consumer era and at the present time, few viable districts remain, although a strong consumer base is still located in the area. Among the assets which could enhance commercial development in Cluster 9 are: higher income households, existing building stock in critical places, a road network, employment centers which spin-off commercial demand, Grand River as a regional commercial spine, and strong neighborhood associations. Some barriers

to development are: competing suburban markets, low maintenance, unattractive storefronts, overall disinvestment, lack of critical mass needed for comparative shopping districts, security and insufficient parking.

The Cluster 9 stakeholders recognize the need for strong commercial districts to reflect the quality of neighborhoods behind major roads, and developed the following goal:

Goal Statement

Devote community resources to reestablish quality commercial districts that provide goods and services for area residents while maintaining an identity as a vital area with opportunities for community interaction.

Priority Objectives

1. Promote quality commercial districts that include a variety of uses such as professional services, recreation, commercial retail and health care.
2. Plan for the stability of the major Cluster 9 commercial districts through activate commercial district organizations that interact with the neighborhoods and provide technical assistance for business development at the local level.
3. Promote existing commercial districts and the rehabilitation of existing buildings.

Housing

The Cluster 9 housing community can be characterized as an early 20th century "bedroom suburb", built primarily in response to the then burgeoning population of the city. Distinct neighborhoods reflected by differences in neighborhood quality and housing characteristics were built in different stages beginning in 1910 through the 1950s.

Cluster 9 focus groups noted important neighborhood characteristics in terms of quality of life issues. These characteristics include strong residential involvement, neighborhood employment opportunities, quality housing stock, quality educational opportunities, and the presence of neighborhood commercial and retail areas. Declining factors in the community include loss of safety, lack of zoning enforcement, lack of neighborhood political leadership and over-saturation of storefront churches. Factors indicating positive trends include rising property values, market values, demand for housing, taxes and homeowner reinvestment.

The Cluster 9 recommendations sought to apply appropriate housing strategies according to the historic standard for quality and overall residential environment. Home values have been rising dramatically in recent years, and stakeholders recognize that increases are most evident in stable neighborhoods with high percentage of homeowners.

Goal Statement

Improve and develop quality residential neighborhoods which reflect the historic character of northwest Detroit.

Priority Objectives

1. Partner with lenders to create information networks which provide education and technical assistance about financing and managing home improvement programs for local residents.

2. Increase levels of home-ownership by promoting programs that provide technical assistance and first time homeowner education.
3. Develop a mixture of new, high-quality, yet affordable housing options to encourage city residency by variety of households seeking a quality living environment.

Job Centers

While not readily visible, Cluster 9 contains a large number of job centers at the periphery of the district along major thoroughfares. The local job market can be enhanced through opportunities related to new technologies and expanded commercial opportunities. The employment base in Cluster 9 is currently located within the medical service industries, the Detroit Medical Center and small industries located along the rail road lines and freeway core along Lyndon at the south and along Schaefer Road from Lyndon to Fenkell.

Opportunities for job growth are present in the Detroit Renaissance Zone area located in the industrial core at Lyndon west of Livernois. Spin-off commercial development should be encouraged to locate close to these sectors (See Neighborhood Commercial recommendations).

Employment targeted to jobs that pay a livable wage will require a level of preparedness, which may not be currently provided through local schools. Therefore, training opportunities must be provided through expanded information networks, which reach those who may not, be linked into traditional job training mechanisms or who have external family issues which prevent employment. The jobs created through other objectives, such as commercial expansion, should be targeted to area residents to keep earnings within the Cluster. Most important, is the involvement of civic, educational and trade organizations, which can network together.

Goal Statement

Stabilize the economic community through improvements in the local job market.

Priority Objectives

1. Develop employment and training opportunities related to commercial redevelopment.
2. Develop a state-of-the-art job information network that is accessible to area residents to provide job placement and skills requirements for area employment.
3. Develop a state-of-the-art job information network that is accessible to area residents to provide metropolitan Detroit job placement information and opportunities to area residents.

Transportation

Transportation in Cluster 9 is primarily conducted through private automobile and public bus systems. On major thoroughfares which follow the original grid pattern of the city. Grand River diagonally bisects the mile roads of the grid. Prior to freeway construction, Grand River performed the function of a major truck-line, carrying capacity of up to 1,000 cars per lane per hour. Freeways (Southfield Freeway at west and Lodge at east boundaries) provide easy access for automobiles to travel downtown and to suburban locations. Bus lines are limited to the mile roads, which connect residents to the CBD but do not transport to suburban job centers.

Goal Statement

Recreate effective transportation systems and infrastructure that connect residents with Detroit neighborhoods, downtown and suburban destinations.

Priority Objectives

1. Improve neighborhood and thoroughfare road conditions.
2. Facilitate better service by SMART and DDOT to city and suburban locations for Cluster 9 residents.
3. Encourage alternative transportation modes to serve Cluster 9 residents and businesses, i.e. Jitneys, flexible mini-vans, car pools, taxis, and light rail.

Environment

The quality of life in Cluster 9 is largely influenced by resident community participation in maintaining the quality of neighborhoods, parks and commercial districts. Stakeholders in Cluster 9 identified a number of serious issues which currently affect the environment, including poor City maintenance of parks and playgrounds, illegal dumping on vacant lots, and difficulties in maintaining a quality environment if abandonment of properties has occurred. Stakeholders felt strongly about the citizen's responsibility to extend stewardship of neighborhoods and streets beyond the individual homestead to assist others in improving the overall image of neighborhoods.

Goal Statement

Empower people to enhance the quality of life in neighborhoods.

Priority Objectives

1. Create a beautiful environment for youth using media images which promote a better quality of life.
2. Promote community stewardship of public streets to enhance the quality of the residential community.
3. Promote good schools as an integral part of the neighborhood.

Youth Development

The Cluster 9 focus group participants felt that the cluster lacked a sufficient number of large park spaces for youth recreation. Adams Butzel Recreation Center stood out in most people's minds as the main location for large recreational activities. The lack of knowledge of existing programs and services due to poor dissemination of information was cited by many to be a key cause of the inadequate level of services and programs being provided to youth.

Goal Statement

Invest community resources in youth to build better neighborhoods.

Priority Objectives

1. Create and encourage better-maintained parks, which provide a wider variety of recreational activities for youth.

2. Encourage a higher level of community and institutional involvement in providing services and facilities for youth. Improve information network of existing services and programming at the neighborhood level.
3. Promote a higher level of community involvement by youth.

Special Issues

A special topic developed by the Cluster 9 board is related to the terrible damage wrought by a violent storm (some say Tornado) which struck the area on July 3, 1997. While the majority of the residential and commercial districts in Cluster 9 were not affected, a section south of Fenkell and east of Wyoming bore the brunt of the devastating storm.

Some assistance has been offered by a Mennonite group called Project Relief which sent volunteers from Ontario to assist in rebuilding some houses. Apparently, few building owners have taken advantage of Federal disaster assistance, and many structures remain uninhabitable.

Cluster 9 determined that special attention should be directed to this area by the City and area stakeholders to assess new opportunities for commercial, housing and job center reconstruction. The area has the potential for redevelopment due to its proximity to the Lodge freeway, the Focus Hope complex and two major universities.

Goal Statement

Address the Tornado district as an area for opportunity.

Objectives

1. Study the viability of rebuilding housing in the area most affected by the Tornado.
2. Establish a special council to guide commercial or industrial redevelopment of the area.